

It is widely understood that Western New York's emerging economy rests on the smart functioning of the U.S.-Canada border, with tourism and goods from Canadian commerce being the two fastest-growing sectors of our regional economy. It is therefore imperative that federal border policies take into account that the Buffalo Niagara economy is closely intertwined with our neighbors across the river.

Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security has again chosen to thicken the Northern border rather than advance smart policies that reduce congestion and facilitate low-risk travel.

After a great deal of effort to promote negotiations and push for an agreement, I was disappointed to receive a call last week from Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff informing me that the department would be walking away from a proposal to relocate the U.S. plaza at the Peace Bridge to the Canadian side. The United States and Canada had been negotiating for more than two years on this idea, known as Shared Border Management.

Business and travel groups embraced the plan as a way to reduce congestion and travel delays at the bridge. The City of Buffalo and the Peace Bridge Authority also favored the plan, as it would allow them to avoid having to build a new plaza that would encroach on West Side neighborhoods.

Homeland Security's decision to toss in the towel demonstrates an unwillingness to develop creative solutions for securing the Northern border. The United States and Canada have had preclearance in place at Canadian airports for years. Homeland Security certainly could have looked to that as a model for shared border management. I believe these negotiations became a proxy for deeper grievances between the two countries over higher-profile border issues, primarily the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

In that regard, Homeland Security is once again pursuing a badly flawed plan that will require all travelers returning from Canada to carry a \$97 passport or a yet-to-be defined \$45 passport card. The Government Accountability Office, a former 9/11 commissioner and several former ambassadors to Canada all agree that this plan is a disaster in the making. It will shut down our border to legitimate trade and travel, causing massive economic harm to Western New York.

I have introduced a bipartisan bill to fix the travel initiative, and am pleased that it has drawn the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Travel Industry Association, among others. The House Homeland Security Committee, at my request, will soon hold a hearing in Buffalo on my legislation.

We can ill-afford to let Homeland Security rush ahead with misguided policies that will shut our border down. I will continue to fight for common-sense solutions to Northern border problems that will keep us safe while defending our economy from self-inflicted harm.